

The Rise of Non-State Actors: Terrorism



STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

What is the impact of Terrorism on a nation's security and the rights of citizens?

Deemed “one of the most serious threats to international peace and security”ⁱ by the United Nations, terrorism threatens the safety of innocent people all around the world. An act of terrorism is violence carried out by a **non-state**¹ actor with political, ideological or religious motivations.ⁱⁱ Terrorism can happen anywhere in the world. It is a very difficult concept to define because of the political and emotional discrimination and because different groups and governments can have very different ideas about what actions can be considered terrorism as well as who is and who is not a terrorist.



Almost 200 people were killed in the Madrid train bombings in 2004.ⁱⁱ

Throughout history, terrorism has been used by governments and non-state actors as a method to weaken certain parts of a government (like the military, economic institutions or embassies that represent a nation overseas) or harm a specific group of people. It is also a way to promote their own ideology, beliefs or religious goals. Terrorism has been on the agenda of international discussion ever since the League of Nations was established in 1919. The basic goal of most terrorist attacks is to inflict fear on the general public, so it threatens entire populations, and is an important problem to be addressed by the Disarmament and International Security Committee.

HISTORY OF THE ISSUE

What events have shaped the way the United Nations responds to Terrorism?

REIGN OF TERROR

During the French Revolution, radical Jacobins, led by Maximilien Robespierre, used violence to oppress citizens and established a government called the Committee of Public Safety in 1793. Robespierre aimed to “purge France of everyone who was corrupt,”ⁱⁱⁱ and **guillotined**² the monarchs, including Marie Antoinette the queen, and those who disagreed or threatened the new government, such as nobles, priests, **bourgeois**³, and peasants. As a result, 250,000 people were arrested; 17,000 were tried and guillotined; 12,000 were executed without trial; and thousands died in jail.^{iv} Ultimately, The Reign of Terror ended only when Robespierre lost power and was executed. Since the time of the French Revolution, there has been an overall shift in who uses terrorism to

Non-State: Organizations involved in global issues that are not countries

Guillotine: a device used for execution by decapitation

Bourgeois: people of the middle-upper class in society

gain power and control. Now more often than not, it is non-state actors that are terrorists. It is important to keep in mind that some dictators and military regimes still use terrorist tactics to maintain control over their people.

September 11

On September 11, 2001, terrorists hijacked four commercial airplanes from Boston, MA, Newark NJ and Washington, D.C. The planes were filled with passengers and crew members. The planes flew into the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon in Virginia, and a field in rural Pennsylvania. The last plane was intended to hit another target in Washington, DC, but the passengers fought back and redirected the plane.^v Around 3,000 people died in this attack.^{vi} Before September 11, no single terrorist attack killed more than 500 people. This new kind of terrorist movement had very detailed planning, as shown by their targets- which symbolized U.S. financial, political, and military power.^{vii}

The perpetrators of the attack were members of al-Qaeda, a radical Sunni Islamic movement led by Osama bin Laden that started in the late 1980s.^{viii} This group promotes religious extremism which stems from resistance and hostility to perceived cultural and economic American dominance in conservative Muslim countries.^{ix} Al-Qaeda had previously been linked to the February 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center,^x the August 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and the October 2000 attack on the USS Cole which killed seventeen American Navy members.

Terrorist attacks after World War II

1946: Zionist Israeli military group Irgun bombed the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. The group was targeting the British Mandate of Palestine. The attack killed 91 people

1972: During the Munich Olympics, the Palestinian group Black September kidnapped and killed 11 Israeli athletes

1970s - 1990s: The Irish Republican Army (IRA) attacked British businesses, hotels, public houses, cars, and caused economic damage of millions of dollars in the 1994 bombing of the London Atlantic Exchange building. The IRA demands the withdrawal of British authority and power from Northern Ireland.

1995: Aum Shinrikyo, a Japanese religious movement, released poisonous sarin gas on the Tokyo subway, killing 13 people and causing temporary vision problems for thousands of others

Madrid Train Bombing

On the morning of March 11, 2004, in Madrid, Spain, ten backpacks filled with dynamite and nails blew up on four packed commuter trains in a terrorist attack. The bombings killed 192 people and injured around 1,800, making it the worst terrorist attack in Spain^{xi} and the worst Islamist terrorist attack in European history.^{xii} The Prime Minister at the time, José Aznar of the Popular Party, immediately blamed the attack on ETA, the Basque separatist group who was later found out to be



unrelated to the attacks. Claims linking the attacks to al-Qaeda had also been made, although the 18 convicted Islamic fundamentalists and their accomplices were only inspired by Osama bin Laden^{xiii} and investigations by the Spanish police found no evidence of al-Qaeda involvement in the attack.^{xiv}

DISCUSSION OF THE PROBLEM

Why is it difficult for nations to agree on a definition of terrorism? What are some of the tactics and characteristics that define terrorist organizations?

DEFINITION OF TERRORISM

The term “terrorism” is so conversional that it doesn’t have an agreed-upon definition among countries, or even the United Nations. However, most governments, scholars and the UN agree that the objective of terrorist organizations is to achieve “social reform and political change”^{xv} by creating fear within the public. Terrorists may have political (e.g. the Irish Republican Army), ideological (e.g. Animal Liberation Front, Earth Liberation Front) and/or religious (e.g. al-Qaeda, Hezbollah) motivations. They could also be seeking revenge and retaliation on the government.^{xvi}

The United Nations, in its resolution 65/34 *Measures to eliminate international terrorism* (2011), “reiterates that criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other nature that may be invoked to justify them.”^{xvii} The United Nations has zero tolerance for non-state actors and has sought ways to stop nations from giving security, money or weapons to terrorist organizations. The goal of an organization often determines its status as a terrorist group, however that is difficult to identify without analyzing a specific attack and the methods used to accomplish that goal.

STATE-SPONSORED TERRORISM

Terrorist organizations lack the army, territory, and sovereignty of a state, but it is their very statelessness that gives them power. As one of their goals may be to convince people that their government is powerless to prevent acts of terrorism, terrorists attempt not only to spread panic but also to undermine confidence in the government and the political leadership of their enemy.

Most terrorist organizations nowadays are one among many types of violent non-state actors , including warlords, militias, paramilitary forces, insurgencies, and criminal organizations/youth gangs. As a result, the military dominance of a nation and its ability to protect its people from violence is weakened. However, some terrorist organizations are state-sponsored or supported by governments that are sympathetic to their goals, like Hezbollah, a Shia Muslim political and military organization allied with the Syrian government. The Syrian government benefits from the harm inflicted by Hezbollah since they attack countries that are a threat to Syria's cultural and political values.

CASE STUDY: HAMAS

HAMAS, or the “Islamic Resistance Movement,” exemplifies the controversies in defining terrorism. HAMAS is the democratically-elected governing body of the Gaza Strip and believes in the creation of a single Islamic state, Palestine, which is currently divided between Israel and the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs claims that between 2000 and 2004, HAMAS perpetrated 425 terrorist attacks in which 377 Israelis were murdered. Israel, the European Union, the United States, Canada, and Japan classify HAMAS as “terrorist,” while the United Nations, Russia, Turkey, and Switzerland do not.

METHODS OF OPERATION

Terrorists try to achieve their goals by extreme means ranging from threats to actual bombings and assassinations, to intimidate, coerce, and create fear among the public. Because most terrorist groups have a relatively small number of members, limited weapons, and comparatively few organizational resources, they rely on dramatic and devastating acts of violence to attract attention to their cause.^{xviii} The instant publicity from these attacks gives them the power and influence that they otherwise lack.^{xix}

Some of the tactics that terrorist use include, but are not limited to: airline hijackings, suicide bombings, car bombs, building explosions, assassinations and kidnappings, mailings of explosive, chemical or biological and **agro-terrorism**^{4, xx} Terrorists may also be able to wreck havoc on a population through computer-based attacks such as viruses or hacking into sensitive information. Terrorists also may use chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) weapons or even

Agro-terrorism: terrorist attack on farming or food supply using plant or animal bacteria and virus



weapons of mass destruction (WMD)^{5, xxi} although some experts argue that this method is unconventional and unlikely because of their limited resources.^{xxii}

Terrorists choose their targets very strategically, because their goal is to intimidate a large group of people, such as an ethnic or religious enemy, an entire country, or the international community.^{xxiii} The psychological effects of terrorism have an important impact on many more people than just the immediate victims of an attack.^{xxiv} The most common targets of terrorists are busy, public places that would attract a lot of attention and cause massive casualties, such as urban transportation centers, international airports, religious institutions, financial centers (like banks), government buildings or high-profile landmarks.

"EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO LIFE, LIBERTY AND SECURITY OF PERSON."

-- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION

Terrorism has a direct and serious impact on human rights, for both its victims and perpetrators, in both acts of terrorism and counterterrorism. Firstly, acts of terrorism on innocent people pose a threat to the fundamental freedoms that all individuals and groups should be able to enjoy, including civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.^{xxv} Terrorism also fuels racist sentiments among groups of victims against those who are of the same ethnicity, nationality or religion as the terrorists. This type of discrimination contributes to hate crimes against different groups of people.

Moreover, to combating international terrorism governments have imposed laws that limit the freedoms of certain groups and the rights of people. Non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International^{xxvi} have condemned such governments for eroding the freedoms of their people. A major debate is how to protect citizens and maintain the rights and privacy of individuals. An example of this debate is the ongoing controversy in the United States over the passage of the Patriot Act in October 2001.

Human rights abuses and torture have also been reported in Guantánamo Bay detention camp, located within the U.S. Naval Base in Cuba, where suspected terrorists from the war in Afghanistan and Iraq are held. The camp, which opened in 2002, has been highly controversial not only in its treatment of detainees, but also in its detention of individuals without charging them with a crime.

Weapons of mass destruction: a weapon that causes harm to a large number of people, the environment, or man-made structures

Efforts have been made by the Obama Administration to close Guantanamo Bay and release the prisoners or charge them with a crime and put them on trial.

ROLE OF WOMEN

Although terrorists have been traditionally seen to be men, around 34% of terrorist attacks have been perpetrated by women since 1985. Sendero Luminoso of Peru and the Baader-Meinhoff gang in Germany are among the most well-known terrorist movements led by women.^{xxvii} Besides the nationalistic and religious motives that most terrorists share, women have certain motives to become terrorists that may differ from men. Many widows and siblings of male terrorists face cultural and political pressure to honor their loved ones by participating in violence. Most often, these women are used as suicide bombers to attack targets that would otherwise be beyond the ability of the terrorist's weapons. In August 2004, al-Qaeda initiated a special website calling on women to persuade their men to take up the jihad.^{xxviii}

PAST INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

What actions have been taken by the United Nations to stop the spread of terrorism?

UNITED NATIONS GLOBAL COUNTER-TERRORISM STRATEGY

The Strategy, adopted in September 2006, is a resolution that aims to improve international efforts in combating terrorism. The Strategy combines different groups in the UN that deal with terrorism. The Strategy is built upon four pillars: (a) Measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism; (b) Measures to prevent and combat terrorism; (c) Measures to build States' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in that regard; (d) Measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism.^{xxix}

WAR ON TERROR

After the devastating attack on September 11, the United States, governed by the George W. Bush administration, the United Kingdom and NATO⁶ led a military campaign to invade Afghanistan and depose the Taliban regime that supported Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. The attacks were aimed at destroying the al-Qaeda network and



The "Knotted Gun," which symbolizes the UN's goal to stop violence, is displayed at the UN headquarters.^{xxxv}

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization, a political and military alliance between countries in North America and Europe



the Taliban government by targeting terrorist training camps and Taliban military installations.^{xxx} In December 2001, the Taliban surrendered its last stronghold, Kandahar. After the fall of the Taliban regime, 18 countries, including France, Italy, Germany, and Britain, contributed to the Security Council-sanctioned peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan to reestablish the country's government and security structures. In May 2011, Osama bin Laden was captured and killed by US Navy Seals in Pakistan. Today, The United States and its NATO allies are planning to begin troop withdrawals in the summer of 2012 and will continue through 2014. All security forces will then be under the command of the Afghani President, Hamid Karzai.

BLOC POSITIONS

NORTH AMERICA AND EUROPE

Western dominance in foreign, especially Middle Eastern, politics has provoked contempt against America and Europe. As a result, Western countries or Westerners in foreign countries may be more vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Combating terrorism and ensuring the security of its member states is one of NATO's top priorities.

ASIA PACIFIC

Domestic and transnational terrorist attacks in Central Asia, Southeast Asia and Japan have alerted Asian governments to enforce security measures within their countries. Governments have also focused on combating terrorism by freezing the assets of terrorist groups.

MIDDLE EAST

The Middle East is the origin of many state-sponsored and non-state terrorist organizations. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the main reasons for terrorism in the region. However, terrorism in the Middle East is not just a regional problem but an international issue that affects the global community.

LATIN AMERICA

Latin America has a few terrorist groups that it deals with. One of the largest groups, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) is a socialist guerilla organization that has committed crimes in Colombia and its neighbors. Terrorism is linked with other issues in the region such as the illicit drug trade, child soldiers, and the use of landmines.

AFRICA

Although the U.S. has repeatedly voiced concern over the al-Qaeda's presence in Africa, African governments do not have the capacity to combat terrorism and on-going armed conflicts. Terrorism is a serious issue especially in countries where the government has weak control of their population and territorial borders.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is your country's definition of terrorism?
2. Is your country a sponsor of a terrorist organization? What are some of the reasons it would support a terrorist organization?
3. If so, how does it affect your country's definition of terrorism?
4. Has your country been a victim of terrorism? If so, does your country have a counter-terrorist policy? How did it respond to the attack?
5. What, if any, restrictions on human rights have been the result of trying to limit terrorism in your country?

RESEARCH WEBSITES

UN Action to Counter Terrorism:

<http://www.un.org/terrorism/>

Country profiles on counter-terrorist capacity:

http://www.coe.int/t/dlapil/codexter/4_Theme_Files/Country_Profiles/default_en.asp

Global Terrorism Database:

<http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/features/GTD-Data-Rivers.aspx>

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UNA-GB Model UN



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